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TRIAL OF FORMER ESTONIAN PRIME MINISTER BEGINS. The trial of former Estonian Prime Minister Indrek Toome began at the Tallinn City Court on 14 March, Reuters reported. Toome, who was premier from 1988 to 1990, is charged with offering a bribe worth 30,000 kroons ($2,700) to a police officer for the return of three confiscated passports. Although Toome could be sentenced for up to two years in prison, state prosecutor Andres Ulviste asked only for a fine to be imposed. Toome's defense did not deny the bribery charges, but accused the police of setting a trap. The court is expected to pass judgment on 16 March. -- Saulius Girnius,
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Dudayev vows Chechen suicide attacks in Russia

MOSCOW, March 14 (Reuter) - Chechen rebel leader Dzhokhar Dudayev threatened, in an interview published on Tuesday, to unleash kamikaze attacks on Russian cities to back his region's struggle for independence. The threat, reported by the Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper, brought an immediate putdown from the Russian interior ministry.

"Dudayev is bluffing again," a ministry official said by telephone. "We all remember how often he has promised to blow up Moscow since military action in Chechnya started. "If terrorists strike, they have surprise on their side, but our services will neutralise them as soon as anything happens."

Dudayev had threatened several times previously to retaliate for Moscow's military intervention in his breakaway Caucasus region with attacks in Russia and he has warned that civilians could die in any such assault.

This time he told Komsomolskaya Pravda: "Kamikaze units are being formed...from those who are ready to die to avenge their fathers and children killed in bombing raids. "When they squeeze into Russian cities, many innocent people may suffer,"' said Dudayev, who is leading the fight against Russian troops and tanks sent to the region on December 11.

The newspaper said the interview took place in a Chechen village.

Dudayev said Chechen fighters had the addresses of those responsible for killing civilians in the rebel Caucasus region, which declared itself independent in 1991. Moscow's troops seized control of the Chechen capital Grozny after weeks of bloody fighting, flattening much of the city in the process. They are now hunting rebel groups in the countryside.

Dudayev described the fighting in Chechnya as genocide rather than war.

"In the Soviet army there was always an understanding about honesty and conscience, about protecting civilian populations," he said. "Things are completely different today. Killing has become heroism, marauding has become courage. And they give medals for that."

He said Chechnya had no shortage of arms or ammunition, saying that weapons had been bought from the Russian army during the fighting. "I cannot say that I can arm all the Chechens who want to struggle for their independence. But we have arms we can fight with," he said.

Russia has stepped up security in its cities and around factories and strategic institutions to cope with Dudayev's threats. The interior ministry official said there would be no let up in vigilance. "Armoured personnel carriers control all the entrances to Moscow. Interior ministry troops, police and regular troops are carrying out joint patrols," he said.